

# **WRITING ART HISTORY**

Disciplinary Departures

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It is sometimes thought that the literature which has been the subject of the present book provided methodologies of art history. It should have become clear that this is a thorough misunderstanding. For what would it provide methods for doing which it did not itself do?

MICHAEL PODRO, *THE CRITICAL HISTORIANS OF ART*

We are wide open to scrutiny. There are no experts with special authority: there are specialists . . . able to initiate explanations as non-specialists cannot, but they must submit to lay judges of their explanations.

MICHAEL BAXANDALL, *PATTERNS OF INTENTION*

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## PREFACE

This book had its origins in conversations that began at a 1987 Summer Institute on Theory and Interpretation in the Visual Arts, organized by Michael Ann Holly, Norman Bryson, and Keith Moxey and funded by the National Endowment for the Humanities. These conversations gained a further determinative impetus from a year's Leverhulme visiting professorship in 2001, which brought us together for a year at the University of Essex. Another opportunity for discussion about the shape of the book was provided by a fellowship at the Sterling and Francine Clark Art Institute, Williamstown, Massachusetts, during the summer of 2005. The most immediate impulse for its writing was the realization that we did not want to take up an invitation to write an "introduction to art history and theory" and that our reasons for not wanting to do so were also reasons for trying to do something else.

Our debts over some twenty years of writing and discussion exceed any possibility of adequate registration, but a few of the mostly deeply shared demand address. The first is surely to Michael Podro, whose teaching and book *The Critical Historians of Art* reopened the paths that bind historiography, theory, and philosophy to one another. A second, equally surely, is to Michael Baxandall, whose visual and writerly lucidity remains a standard for our clumsier wanderings in ranges of speculation he was content to engage in more subtle ways. It is hard not to see their dying within months of each other in 2008 as marking a particular moment for contemporary art history. This book is dedicated to their memory.

A third debt is to Michael Ann Holly, who has done so much in her own intellectual work and through the various institutions she has created or transformed to keep open the terrain on which this book unfolds. We cannot imagine what shape theoretical reflection in art history might have assumed apart from her absolute and endlessly generous commitment to conversation and controversy.

Art history has over the past several decades been a field of extraordinary achievement, and the present book is driven to a high degree by a



sense of the difference made by the work of such figures as Svetlana Alpers, Tim Clark, Hubert Damisch, Michael Fried, Joseph Koerner, Rosalind Krauss, Leo Steinberg, and others, many of whom receive some more or less sustained treatment within the book but all of whom inform it fundamentally in a multitude of ways. One of our goals has been to create a context within which their achievements become more fully appreciable and the terms of those achievements become more central to the discipline's self-understanding than is currently the case.

WE ALSO HAVE OUR more personal debts. Although we have already paid tribute to Michael Podro, Margaret Iversen would like to thank him, belatedly, for being her mentor since the mid-1970s when she was writing a PhD at the University of Essex under his supervision. The memory of his graduate seminars is still fresh: We were crowded around an oblong table, Michael sitting in a large black swivel chair at the head. The light in the room was low, so we hunched over our copies of Kant's *Critique of Judgment* as Michael read and made us think. Other colleagues at Essex have been generous along the way, most especially in the context of this book Thomas Puttfarcken, now also sadly departed. Another colleague, and spouse, Jules Lubbock, was always ready to engage with my ideas and challenge them. I am most grateful to him.

Stephen Melville would like to thank Margaret Iversen for urging this project in the first place. Much of the thinking that has gone into these essays was explored and worked over in courses taught at The Ohio State University, and I'm grateful to the students and colleagues who shared in them. Ruth Melville has had everything to do with this book's coming to completion; I cannot thank her enough.

WE ARE JOINTLY GRATEFUL for support from our respective universities that made the book possible by allowing time for research, and more particularly to the College of Arts and Sciences at The Ohio State University for its help in defraying the costs of illustration. We had crucial assistance in the preparation of the manuscript from Matthew Bowman at Essex and Greer Pagano at Ohio State. We are also very grateful to the efficient staff at the University of Chicago Press, particularly our editor, Susan Bielstein.

## CHAPTER ONE

### What's the Matter with Methodology?

How does a field like the history of art come into being?

If one looks at the standard art history curriculum in universities, the answer looks easy: there is art; it is widely spread out in time and space; and art history is the study of this object with due attention to its historical and social specificity (thus the discipline's characteristic curricular articulation by period and geographical location). But when we look at this curriculum a little more closely, its shape becomes noticeably blurrier. Some of its primary terms do seem to answer well to the general picture—Northern Renaissance, for example—but others seem to have a rather looser relation to the presumed underlying scheme. “Baroque” does indeed seem to name a chunk of time—some people would say, unhappily, that in the end that's all it does—but the term was intended, and for many people still does function to at least some extent, as a style name above all, and the relation between a style—a difficult enough notion by itself—and a historical period remains obscure. And as we move forward from the Baroque, whatever it is or was, matters become only more obscure as the shape of art's history seems to bend more and more toward particular names offered by particular groups of artists—“Realism,” say, or “Impressionism”—many of which amount to interpretations of or at least positions in relation to something we tend to call “Modernism,” without our having any very clear sense of what kind of name *that* is. More recently, we've found ourselves repeatedly tempted to speak of something called “Postmodernism,” a label that inherits all that is obscure in its presumed predecessor and is often seen to either complicate or dissolve these various questions about art's historical shape by laying claim to a distinctively posthistorical condition.

Within these curricular terms further difficulties tend to surface very quickly: the medieval makers of the objects that art history studies described neither themselves as artists nor the objects they made as art, and students

of Asian art will often feel that the objects and practices to which they attend are repeatedly falsified or betrayed by the categories of distinctively Western art-historical thought. Classroom—and other—discussions of these issues rapidly become muddy and even bad-tempered: many historians of Asian art do, for all practical purposes, exactly the same kind of interpretive work as most of their Western counterparts while nonetheless feeling that their apparatus and interests require some fundamentally different articulation from that assumed by students of Western art. At times this can feel like an argument about the relevance of the term “art,” and at other times it can feel like an argument about “history” as a peculiarly Western shape of or frame for meaning. It’s typical of these arguments that this uncertainty about the applicability of either or both of the terms that give the discipline its name to objects fostered outside of their explicit historical or cultural presence will not feel itself resolved by writing those objects off to anthropology or religious history; typically too the institutionalized study of art history has finessed the actual arguments here in favor of an underlying attitude—“a conviction of the dignity of man, based on both the insistence on human values (rationality and freedom) and the acceptance of human limitation (fallibility and frailty)”<sup>1</sup>—which orients the discipline to “insight into the manner in which, under varying historical conditions, essential tendencies of the human mind [are] expressed by specific themes and concepts.”<sup>2</sup> While one may find oneself driven to such assertions in defending a certain view of the scope and practice of art history, it’s notable that the view itself offers no particular reason why such an attitude is best or even appropriately crystallized into the particular shape of the discipline it is called on to justify. That shape remains at once arbitrary and obvious. What else could art history be? What other shape could it have?

QUESTIONS ON THIS order were once the stuff of major art-historical reflection—the substance of implicit and explicit exchanges among such figures as Heinrich Wölfflin, Alois Riegl, Aby Warburg, and Erwin Panofsky. By and large these conversations now strike most art historians as largely matters of prehistory, and so our feel for their shape and stakes tends to be weak. But that sense is itself a consequence of a particular intellectual and institutional settlement of just those conversations, so one aspect of this book is broadly diagnostic, trying to bring into view the terms and possible costs of that settlement. Our claim is that one of the major costs has been the

reduction of all forms of theoretical reflection on art history to matters of “method.” The larger goal is to renew that order of discussion on the shifted ground of contemporary art-historical theory and practice.<sup>3</sup>

If the questions we are interested in are already there in the writings that founded the modern discipline of art history, they seem to have gained a certain salience amid a fairly widespread contemporary sense of significant change or crisis within the field—a sense sometimes felt as a significant alteration in art’s relation to its own past and sometimes as an alteration in the art historian’s relation to his or her object. The first of these is surely related to the recent burgeoning of art-historical interest in recent and contemporary art, while the latter appears variously expressed in the rise of “theory,” in a certain historiographic turn within parts of the discipline, and in the emergence of various alternatives or quasi-alternatives to art history mostly clustered under the rubrics of “visual studies” and “visual culture.” All of these have been familiar bits of the landscape for a while now, but their familiarity is no indication that they have been made active sense of. Our own feeling is that we don’t in fact know what is distinctively new on this terrain and what only appears new while actually continuing to run along in well-established grooves, and it has seemed to us that one way to do that job of making sense is to bring the elements of contemporary theory into much closer contact than they typically have been with the older reflections on the discipline. This is a far from arbitrary coupling: both the modern discipline of art history and broad swathes of contemporary theory emerge in intimate dialogue with Hegelian and post-Hegelian thought, so what has to be shown is, in effect, how and where they are already speaking to one another.

A general motive for the book is a sense that contemporary art history operates for the most part with a distinctly impoverished sense of its own possibilities—and does so despite what might seem the massive enrichment of its methodological apparatus under the impact of contemporary “theory.” This is to say that the possibilities in which we are primarily interested are not methodological but bear more directly on the object and objectivity—the shape or shapes—of the discipline itself. Given the recent and continuing emergence of a “visual studies” or “visual culture” variously conceived as subsuming, adjacent to, or competing with art history, such questions seem to us to have a certain urgency. Since “theory”—or a certain grasp of it—has played a significant role in bringing visual culture into being,

this is inevitably also a book about “theory,” or at least the various ways in which its particular news might be best understood. If literary study by and large received French theory on the ground of what was widely perceived as a debilitating absence of proper theory in the field, art history encounters it—or at any rate should encounter it—from within an already rich set of internal theoretical and philosophical reflections that, in fact, share significant stretches of intellectual history with the bodies of thought now compounded under the general rubric of “theory.” In this sense, an exploration of the disciplinary possibilities of art history has a distinctive capacity to address “theory” and to ask questions about the different shapes it might assume for the field. Where it is seen primarily as a matter of methodology, the question of writing, when it emerges, will appear first of all as a question about methodological self-consciousness and so seem to entail a reflexive attention to something like the historian’s position or identity. This is an understanding of theory with which we are more or less systematically at odds, taking it as an explicitly skeptical variation on the disciplinary understanding that generates the call for method in the first place.

Our way of taking these things up has, of course, its narrownesses: we are interested in a fairly particular intellectual tradition within art history (the one set in motion primarily by Hegel, and particularly, but not exclusively, as it is taken up and transformed by a body of French thought emergent in the 1950s and after), and although we offer no particular narrative of these matters, our sense of how this tradition matters to art history tends to make much of the way various issues and stakes get sorted out in the 1920s and 30s. Implicit in both of these remarks is the further possible narrowness embedded in our assumption that intellectual traditions count—are a good enough way of addressing a discipline’s history and of making out or reopening some of its possibilities.

What we are calling “possibilities” in this way are not, presumably, things that lie outside of art history—as if taking them up meant doing something other than what art history does or has done. The question we are trying to ask is about how art history might become itself or how it might discover less baffled views of its own practices. There’s a sense in which we aim at a sort of radical provocation—as if we are claiming that art history is yet to be invented (and we *are* claiming that) and that no one is more responsible for the future of art history than the individual art historian (and we are indeed also claiming that)—but we are also claiming that there is no other place

for this invention than art history and that one major means of such invention is just the reading of art history’s writing. For this one might imagine a quasi-therapeutic model: *ne cede pas sur ton désir!*<sup>4</sup> But one might also explore a view of disciplinarity along the lines of Stanley Cavell’s idea about “medium” in a modernist situation—as something to be invented out of itself and without criteria.<sup>5</sup>

The *Lectures on Fine Art* of G. W. F. Hegel appear to lay the groundwork of a recognizable art history in something like these terms.<sup>6</sup> Certainly they were taken as such a starting point by those we now think of as founders of the modern university discipline. One easily recognizes in Hegel’s lectures any number of motifs that continue to haunt, for better or for worse, the field we currently occupy: a strong, essentially European, narrative of art’s continuous development up to a problematic present, an active worry about the meaning and possibilities of modern art, coming to a particular point with Hegel’s claim that “art is now for us essentially a thing of the past,” a particular valorization, characteristic of nineteenth-century German thought and more particularly grounded in Johann Joachim Winckelmann’s earlier writings on Greek art, of ancient Classical sculpture as the moment of art’s fullest and most valuable achievement, and a continuous recourse to concrete accounts of particular works are among the most salient features of Hegel’s two volumes of lectures. Some of this deserves a second, more historically aware look: if Hegel can be said, accurately enough, to marginalize non-Western art, it also is the case that he is among the first to attempt to give a serious and sustained account of it, just as he belongs to the generation that offered the first serious and sustained accounts of Asian thought (tellingly, the *Bhagavad Gita* is a text Hegel treats not only historically but also directly philosophically), and if we are now unsurprised to see Dutch art in our textbooks, it’s probably important that Hegel was among its early champions and was particularly struck by the emergence within it of genre painting.

Hegel began offering his lectures on aesthetics in 1820 and offered versions of the course three more times before his death in 1831 (the English translation is part of a complex compilation of notes now in the process of being unwound into individual courses by German scholars). Those same years saw the construction of what is generally recognized as the first modern art museum, Karl Friedrich Schinkel’s *Altes Museum* in Berlin. Hegel’s lectures were given at the University of Berlin, founded in 1809 and, like

Schinkel's museum, commonly recognized as the first of its kind—which is to say, the first of our kind. Hegel, long an active proponent of educational reform in Germany, had joined its faculty in 1818.<sup>7</sup> This institutional confluence is reasonably taken as a part of the conditions that make possible Hegel's offering of what amounts, in retrospect, to the first recognizable course in the history of art. Hegel's own view of this institutional context is an interestingly mixed matter: he was explicitly aware of and heavily invested in the emergence of a new type of university, although it is striking that the institution of such central importance to him finds no explicit place within his philosophy. He was also very aware of the general world of European collections and galleries, including such details as where admission was or wasn't charged and what difference one's status as a university professor made to one's access to such collections; he involved himself actively in efforts to bring one such collection to Berlin; and he made free use of metaphors we now read as relating essentially to the logic of the museum. But at the same time, he does not seem to have seen the modern museum as a new and distinct institution requiring particular thought or justification. The year of the Altes Museum's completion, 1830, was for Hegel very much a political year, consumed both by his assumption of the rectorate at the university and by his active engagement with the consequences of the July Revolution in France and the fate of the Reform Bill in England. He is not known to have ever entered the new museum.<sup>8</sup> Still, Hegel looks very much like our institutional contemporary.

For Hegel, art was a form of thought, and so addressing art called for no particular method beyond that called for by thought itself in its continuous movement and transformation. This is not, Hegel says, a matter of method, because the terms are those generated by thought itself. This subordination of interests in method or epistemology more broadly to a certain way of working through an object gave rise to a distinctive post-Hegelian tradition oriented to questions of ontology and interpretation, writing and reading, one particular outcome of which is the complex body of French thought that has been such a strong influence on art history in recent decades. It's on this general terrain that the various essays in this book unfold.

There is no place within Hegel's lectures for separate remarks on theory or method, and so presumably there would be no place in a "Hegelian" department of art history for the specialized "methods" courses that are now so common in our own departments and that have served as the primary

locus for the reception and dissemination of contemporary theory. These courses vary considerably, but they usually consist of a heterogeneous compilation of "approaches," sometimes sufficiently broadly construed as to allow some acquaintance with, say, Wölfflin or Panofsky (fuller acquaintance is most often reserved to a separate course in historiography). Such methods courses will likely include a strong showing of alternative, explicitly politically motivated, approaches such as the social history of art or feminist art history, and will include as well an interdisciplinary component that involves psychoanalysis, semiotics, and philosophical aesthetics. This latter grouping is what is most often collectively referred to as theory and often responds to developments in literary and film studies. In some cases, and more cynically, these courses are driven by the demand of deans or of funding bodies that the humanities conform to the model of the social sciences with their explicit reliance on a body of skills, protocols, and methods to which scholars must adhere. Whatever the original intention, the disciplinary bazaar of the typical art-historical theories and methods course is bound to give the impression that here is where one will be equipped with the necessary tools to do the job of an art historian.

This is no doubt a caricature, but it will serve as a rough sketch of the situation this book means to address. Whatever their differences, the very idea of a "methodology" course or book suggests that there is a field of freestanding objects (visual art and architecture) and that certain specialist tools and techniques must be wielded by the art historian in order to study them. In other words, the underlying assumption is that "method" bears an external relation to both the subjects and the objects of art history. It is one of the aims of this book to put that idea to the test. Historical surveys of the actual development of the discipline are less susceptible to this sort of misrecognition, because the idea of a tradition implies a continuous writing and rewriting of the discipline and always contains within it the thought of a projected future that must bear an integral relation to what has gone before. One is presented, then, not with an array of alternatives but with the continuous unfolding of a complex conversation. Such a survey will also reveal the changing shape of a discipline that in its formative years gave weight predominantly to the Renaissance and Baroque periods and which now gravitates toward twentieth-century and contemporary art. The conclusion to draw from this is that the history of the discipline has created the field of objects. Furthermore, it implies that these objects are not "bare";

they are covered by certain descriptions and caught up in particular, sometimes long-standing, debates—some of which we reengage in the chapters that follow.

The subjects of art history are equally internal to the discipline. Students, young scholars, come to the discipline with particular intellectual formations and personal investments, particular ways of seeing, styles of thinking and writing. One problem with “methodology” is that it suggests the plausibility of putting all that aside to download the discipline—typically in two steps: first the archive or canon, then the method or methods. In short, it suggests that “transferable,” abstract methods and skills can be extracted from the texture of art-historical writing. The stress we place on *writing* art history is intended to counter all these assumptions. It proposes a model of thinking about our discipline that is different from the implicitly mechanistic one summed up by *methodology*.

In doing this we are presumably asking art history to change in significantly deep ways, but not by becoming something other than art history. We are evidently aimed at making out dimensions and possibilities unacknowledged or unrecognized by the discipline, and so one underlying question must be about how something like a discipline might become other than it knows itself to be. The question itself seems a distinctly modern one, asked out of some deep uncertainty about the grounds or justice of any received form of thought or practice (and it may be worth noting that it is no more—and no less—obscure than a question of how one might manage *not* to become other than one knows oneself to be). One early and repeated lesson of modernism in the arts is that becoming unrecognizable to ourselves—as persons, as forms of art, as social formations—is indeed something we can do, one of our major possibilities, and that by itself this may well mean—and certainly guarantees—nothing. Presumably we should ask—cannot but ask—something similar of claims about an art history (or for art histories) other than the one in which we currently recognize ourselves and our activities. The primary focus of this book is accordingly on the conditions under which art history claims an object at all; it aims at thickening or enriching the discipline’s imagination of its possible objectivity and so can take no particular imagination of objectivity as normative. What we offer here are above all readings of art history, conducted with a view to making out a range of possible transformations in it. This has posed certain writerly difficulties: if “introductions” to theory or historiography can assume a certain

clarity about their starting point and proceed by variously summarizing and paraphrasing the often difficult texts they treat, “reintroductions” are saddled with beginning in the midst of texts and readings already in circulation, and they can unfold only by tracking those texts ever more closely. The straightforward and the complex find themselves at times uneasily compounded.

IT WILL TAKE NO more than a few quick glances at the pages that follow to notice that this book has two notably distinct authors who are not engaged in presenting a single, unified argument and who differ quite strikingly in style, central intellectual concerns, and modes of negotiating between discursive and visual materials.<sup>9</sup> It will take perhaps a little more reading to notice that neither author presents across the body of his or her individual essays anything that amounts to a unified argument or tightly coherent theoretical position. No doubt each of our sets of essays reflects, quite strongly, a particular orientation within the field of the book’s concerns, and it may be that they reflect something more than that—but we have not asked them to do so. Rather, we have wanted to put together a set of closely intermeshed explorations of a range of topics of substantial art-historical interest and driven overall by a few fundamental commitments. The most important of these commitments is to the thought that art history happens, and matters, as writing (and so also that one way of thinking about art history is by an active engagement in reading, a consequence that actively shapes each of our chapters). A second commitment is to the thought that however serviceable it may be much of the time, the distinction between art history and art criticism is not particularly deep—not deep enough, in any case, to play a role in defining art history: what art-historical writing does is show its object, and showing that is inevitably also the performance of a judgment. Both of these assumptions are addressed explicitly at any number of points throughout the book. A third commitment that is perhaps not as persistently explicit is to the proposition that art history is a specifically and consequentially modern discipline. This is no doubt related to our shared substantive interests in modern and contemporary art, but the exact nature of that relation, either overall or in each individual case, remains significantly open-ended. Whatever the modernity of the discipline may amount to, it does not play out in a devaluation of the study of “nonmodern” art, however it may be defined.



We've tried to put the book together in a way that makes for sensible and interesting consecutive reading, and we've tried also to weave a fairly rich texture of cross-reference through or across it. But as a set of "explorations" the whole necessarily remains essentially a matter of essays, and we expect—mean—it to remain approachable on such terms. We think we've chosen and ordered a set of topics that move interestingly across a range of issues important to contemporary art history and so open out a number of possibilities for reimagining their stakes and terms; we certainly would not want to claim to have exhausted the field of such concerns.

ONE OF THE CONNECTING threads running through this book is an argument with Erwin Panofsky. We hope that our arguments here are sufficiently clear and pointed that they do not appear as mere Panofsky-bashing. At the same time, we do think these arguments still need making; Panofsky's understanding of what constitutes art history is so deeply embedded in our thought that we are scarcely aware of it and tend to imagine that we have somehow moved further beyond his fundamental terms than we actually have. Even those who do not invoke his name carry in their heads a certain picture of the art historian at work, and often positions advanced as if in opposition to him do little more than carry his underlying framework into areas he could not have imagined for it.<sup>10</sup> This is hardly accidental: Panofsky's vision of art history is in fact extraordinarily compelling and built out of a deep attachment to a particular construal of a particular range of objects central to the discipline. In chapter 2 we show that Panofsky positions the art historian at the apex of a perspectival apparatus from which detached vantage point he surveys a field of already-constituted objects. The apparatus, that is to say, his methodology, creates a particular kind of objectivity dependent on something called "historical distance," a particular way of describing and locating an otherness fundamental to any art-historical inquiry. Yet the discipline might be imagined very differently. The art historian might rather be found encountering objects that are already in themselves self-critical, so that writing about such objects becomes a matter of attending closely to them. While Panofsky makes description and identification the bedrock of interpretation, we would counter that, given the nature of our objects, description not only is already interpretation but is also as much outcome of as precondition for interpretation. Michael Baxandall's work is offered as a model of a writing alert to such play, and our reading of

his *Patterns of Intention* is, in turn, offered as a model of the sort of attention the best art-historical writing requires and deserves.

The next chapter, "On the Limits of Interpretation," continues the critique of Panofsky, this time on the ground of his particular conception of iconology. The general model of interpretation delineated in his "Iconography and Iconology" is here put to the test by comparing the very different readings of Albrecht Dürer's *Melencolia I* offered by Aby Warburg, Panofsky, and Walter Benjamin. We aim to show that the differing views are not a matter of arcane iconographical interpretation but rather of different conceptions of the field of art history. The themes of detachment and attachment, distance and intimacy, raised in chapter 1 recur here. Warburg conceives of cultural history as marked by a dialectical movement between the extremes of demonic possession and lifeless detachment. For him, Dürer's print is poised between these poles: it finds a space for profound thought in the arms of a malign humor and the astral demon Saturn. Panofsky's Neoplatonic interpretation, in contrast, understands the allegorical figure as the image of the artist frustrated by her inability to transcend the physical and phenomenal worlds and so attain knowledge of the pure, abstract Ideas. Panofsky thus substitutes an epistemological model for Warburg's sense of the power of the image both to enthrall us and to create room for thought. Both Warburg's and Benjamin's sense of the work links it to the intimate themes of depression, madness and death, carefully kept at a distance by Panofsky—as if they threatened to implicate the art historian.

"What the Formalist Knows," our third chapter, returns to an issue broached in chapter 2, the continuity between art history and criticism, and does so in the context of a reevaluation of Heinrich Wölfflin's celebrated but now unfashionable book *The Principles of Art History*. In this rereading, Classical and Baroque are no longer understood as discrete descriptors of particular periods of the history of art. Rather, the terms are shown to bear a relation to each other rather more like the distinction in language between the literal and the figural. We also bring out what might be called Wölfflin's modernity. He makes us aware of the continual transformation of style and the way the present recognizes itself as breaking from the past, while also realizing that the present will soon become part of what is called tradition. Just as the line drawn between the literal and the figurative is constantly shifting, so too do the lines between what we take to be "Renaissance," "Baroque," and "modern." Equally, just as there is no original literal language

that then gets a figural gloss, there is no straightforward vision of things that then develops a rhetorical turn, say, in painting. What the formalist knows is that human vision is through and through rhetorical, that is, conditioned by language.

Art history's broad turn away from "formalism" has been very far from putting an end to its concentration on vision; indeed, much of the interest of contemporary European thought in art history has centered just there. Chapters 5 and 6 engage with different aspects of this interest. The chapter called "The Spectator" begins with an account of the groundbreaking work of Alois Riegl on the role of the spectator, focusing particularly on his reading of Rembrandt's *Syndics of the Amsterdam Drapers' Guild*. Riegl adopts Hegel's distinction between the statue's self-contained autonomy and painting's dependence on or solicitation of the beholder; the first closes in on itself, while the second exists for others. Riegl turns Hegel's phenomenology of our experience of the statue and painting into two major types of pictorial composition: while Italian Renaissance composition can be described as "internally coherent" in its narrative closure, Dutch group portraiture develops a form of "external coherence" that includes the viewer. Leo Steinberg revives Riegl's distinction in his exemplary analysis of Picasso's *Demoiselles d'Avignon* and in his reading of Velázquez's *Las Meninas*. The chapter also considers the relation of the critical writing of Michael Fried and Robert Morris to Hegel's broad typology of the composition of a work of art. One thing that is demonstrated here is the extent to which Hegel's art theory continues to inform the best art-historical writing.

"The Gaze in Perspective" continues the theme of the different positions the viewer takes in relation to a work of art. It is a study of the twentieth century's recurrent critiques of perspective construction. The way in which perspective makes the represented world conform to the position of the spectator is said to encourage an illusory sense of visual mastery. The gaze it creates is disembodied, monocular, and distanced. An early and very influential exponent of this view was Maurice Merleau-Ponty, whose appreciation of Cézanne centered on his ability to depict "lived perspective." More recently, film theorists influenced by Jacques Lacan have equated perspective with the mirror stage of infantile development, when the subject mistakenly recognizes himself as autonomous and in control. However, the French art historian Hubert Damisch has challenged this view, arguing persuasively that perspectival representation has precisely the opposite

subjective effect. For him, perspective positions the viewer in such a way as to shatter any pretension to autonomy. The visual grammar of perspective is comparable to Lacan's conception of language or the symbolic order that precedes and determines the subject's relations with the world.

The next two chapters address the issue of the particular difficulties raised by writing about visual works of art. Does the fact that the medium of critical discourse is linguistic while the objects of our inquiry are not have certain consequences? Chapter 7, "Seeing and Reading," surveys some of the most important reflections on this question. We show how critical writing oscillates between a robust attitude that aims to read the work of art as if it were a text and one that takes this practice to task for betraying the specifically aesthetic, sensory, nonlinguistic nature of our experience of the visual work of art. We set the stage for this debate by introducing Jean-François Lyotard's 1971 attack on structuralism and poststructuralism, *Discours, figure*. His strategy, which is broadly deconstructive, is to point out the extent to which language is dependent on reference and phonic or legible substance. Following Merleau-Ponty, he also criticizes the way Western visual representation is penetrated by discourse. One of Lyotard's readers was Roland Barthes, whose career, we argue, is marked by his ambivalence about whether to take up the discursive or figural side, that is, whether to adopt a poststructuralist or phenomenological position. Critiques of the paradigm of structural linguistics often make reference to the American philosopher Charles Sanders Peirce, whose work was usefully mediated by Roman Jakobson. Both advanced the idea that language has iconic and indexical as well as symbolic dimensions. This opened the way for art historians such as Meyer Schapiro to explore the hybrid nature of the visual sign.

While Hegel plays an important part in many of the preceding chapters, he takes center stage in chapter 8, "Plasticity: The Hegelian Writing of Art." The chapter confronts the issue at stake in much of what we have written: Is a history of art that takes its bearings, as it once did, from Hegel's *Lectures on Fine Arts* one that is worth recovering? Beyond immediate objections to his Eurocentrism or his totalizing historical teleology, does his work still carry an understanding of art indispensable for the future of art-historical writing? By tracking the shape of Hegel's theory of art's historical development, we show that the achievement of Classical sculpture, its "plasticity," occupies a space that is later taken up, after the end of art, by philosophy. Art's important role in history, on this account, seems to be to discover a

content together with an adequate concrete form. The recognition of the plasticity of thought and language ties the theme of this chapter back to the preceding one. Both aim to show that language is continuous with the condition of art and not an arbitrary imposition on an otherwise mute and purely visual art object. Continuous, but not coincident; we still struggle to make our language stick to works of art.

The final chapter turns to the way the contemporary university impinges on how art history is done. Whatever one may finally want to say about Panofsky's role in shaping a certain understanding of art history, that understanding is now massively reinforced by the ongoing professionalization of the subject—and of the humanities and the university in general—in which methodology becomes ever more dominant and more exclusively defining of the terms of inquiry. We argue that this development coincides with the more general dominance of what Heidegger called “technology” and characterized in terms of the reduction of the world to a stock of available and, as it were, merely denumerable items.

The issue here is not about the real value and difficulty of scholarship—of knowing what one is talking about, of discovering new facts, of attending closely to works and contexts, of finding real problems at the heart of received knowledge, and so on; that is the day-in day-out work of art history as it is of any field of inquiry. The question is what becomes of all that under a particular regime in which the instrumentalization of knowledge and skepticism go hand in hand and where “curriculum” amounts to no more than an inventory of goods on offer, such that the question of what object it claims or articulates can no longer be raised except in terms of the specializations within which each member of staff administers the terms of his or her career.

To try to imagine the real work of reading and writing within the practice of art history is to explore its capacity to sustain an object in the face of modernity's ongoing work of dissolution; it's just such imagining that we've tried to start here.

## CHAPTER TWO

### Historical Distance (Bridging and Spanning)

#### THE CONSTRUCTION OF DISTANCE

We begin from the thought that the field of art history is far from level ground: particular periods, places, and kinds of art stand out with varying degrees of prominence, while other periods, places, and kinds of art drift toward the margins of the discipline. In recent years this unevenness has become controversial, resulting in new ways of doing art history, often coupled with attention to the underregarded regions of the field, and in disciplinary challenges to the structure of the field as a whole, most frequently under the rubric of visual culture or visual studies.

Within the modern discipline of art history the Renaissance has always been the largest object in the landscape. It is the period many tend to see as representing the highest achievement of Western art, but it is also, more importantly, the period in which recognizable modern claims about “art” and “artists” first come fully into view against the medieval background of largely artisanally produced works tightly integrated with their social, largely religious contexts. It is also the period in which the art historian finds the first texts that reflect an activity recognizably related to the work of the modern art historian—Vasari's *Lives of the Artists* is a valuable documentary source for our understanding of Renaissance art, and art historians are also sharply inclined to recognize Vasari himself as a founder of art history. There is a strong sense in which art history—a distinctively modern discipline whose own history is so closely intertwined with that of the modern university that emerges with it in the nineteenth century—takes the form of a “return” to its presumed Renaissance origins, and it seems hardly accidental that so many of the figures that contribute to its founding—Berenсон, Morelli, Wölfflin, Pater, Burckhardt—were, in whole or substantial part, what we would now call “Renaissance specialists.”



Particularly important among these figures, especially in the United States, is Erwin Panofsky. Panofsky took the Renaissance not only as the paradigmatic object of art-historical knowledge but also as the primary model for the shape of that knowledge, as if the Renaissance were the mirror in which the art historian first grasped his or her own image. That something of this sort should be the case was far from obvious when Panofsky began writing. Indeed, his nearest major predecessors—Alois Riegl, Heinrich Wölfflin, and Aby Warburg—had all, in different ways, advanced views of art-historical principles and practice that looked primarily outside the Renaissance—to various accounts of the Baroque, and more particularly the Northern Baroque in the cases of Riegl and Wölfflin, and to “the primitive” in Warburg’s instance (we will look more closely at some of these positions in later chapters). While Panofsky sometimes confronts his predecessors directly—as in his 1920 essay “The Concept of Artistic Volition,” which attempts to show that Riegl’s rather Hegelian notion of the *Kunstwollen* can only have a psychological sense<sup>1</sup>—he more typically uses particular accounts of particular objects or practices as levers with which to shift the apparent foundations of the discipline into a different position. Albrecht Dürer is one of his most important such levers; by the late nineteenth century Dürer was firmly established as a paradigmatically “Northern” artist, the figure who carries the work of the Italian Renaissance back across the Alps and in doing so carries it beyond itself, engendering a new tradition. Panofsky, however, reverses this reading of Dürer’s Italian travels: for him Dürer is the artist who explicitly secures the achievements of the South and so makes that achievement binding and normative for subsequent art.<sup>2</sup> Panofsky’s more specific interest in Dürer is thus, first of all, in Dürer’s theoretical contributions—his systematic work on both the canon of human proportions, on which Panofsky writes a major essay in 1921, and perspective, which he takes up in a pivotal essay from 1925, translated into English only in 1991.

While the scholarly apparatus of both essays has all the density typical of Panofsky, the crucial conclusions are cleanly stated. In the case of the essay on human proportion, it is that Dürer finally arrives at a canon that grants due regard to the “visual impression of the beholder” and so demonstrates that “it is the Renaissance which, for the first time, not only affirms but formally legitimizes and rationalizes these three forms of subjectivity.”<sup>3</sup> “Perspective as Symbolic Form” offers, as it were, the necessary pendant: “Once

again this perspectival achievement is nothing other than a concrete expression of a contemporary advance in epistemology or natural philosophy. . . . The result was a translation of psychophysiological space into mathematical space; in other words, an objectification of the subjective.”<sup>4</sup> In Dürer, we find the Renaissance, which is to say an essentially modern, epistemological balance of subject and object made theoretically explicit and secure: the Renaissance knows what it is to see, and sees what it is to know.

Panofsky is equally clear in the larger conclusions he draws from this. The essay on human proportions puts its point this way: “Those who like to interpret historical facts symbolically may recognize in this the spirit of a specifically modern conception of the world which permits the subject to assert itself against the object as something independent and equal,”<sup>5</sup> and the essay works its way to conclusion by entering an oblique warning against a presumably pseudo-modern turn toward arbitrariness:

The styles that may be grouped under the heading “non-pictorial” subjectivism—pre-Baroque Mannerism and modern “Expressionism”—could do nothing with a theory of human proportions, because for them the solid objects in general, and the human figure in particular, meant something only in so far as they could be arbitrarily shortened and lengthened, twisted, and, finally, disintegrated.

In “modern” times, then, the theory of human proportions, abandoned by the artists and the theorists of art, was left to the scientists—except for circles fundamentally opposed to the progressive development which tended toward subjectivity.<sup>6</sup>

“Perspective as Symbolic Form” opens by invoking Ernst Cassirer on “symbolic form” in a way that not only sets the terms of the essay’s largest argument but also usefully glosses the earlier essay’s remark about “those who like to interpret historical forms symbolically”: “[perspective] may even be characterized as (to extend Ernst Cassirer’s felicitous term to the history of art) one of those ‘symbolic forms’ in which ‘spiritual meaning is attached to a concrete, material sign and intrinsically given to this sign.’”<sup>7</sup> The morals Panofsky draws are again highly general and aimed at establishing a particular model of objectivity for art history:

Thus the history of perspective may be understood with equal justice as a triumph of the distancing and objectifying sense of the real, and as a triumph of the distance-denying human struggle for control; it is as much a consolida-

tion and systematization of the external world, as an extension of the domain of the self. . . .

Perspective, in transforming the *ousia* (reality) into the *phainomenon* (appearance), seems to reduce the divine to a mere subject matter for human consciousness; but for that very reason, conversely, it expands human consciousness into a vessel for the divine. It is thus no accident if this perspectival view of space has already succeeded twice in the course of the evolution of art: the first time as the sign of an ending, when antique theocracy crumbled; the second time as the sign of a beginning, when modern "anthropocracy" first reared itself.<sup>8</sup>

As Michael Podro has succinctly put it, "the Renaissance perspective construction lies both within the range of historical constructions and is also a transhistorical reference point."<sup>9</sup> The result is the discovery within art's history of the conditions of its art-historical objectivity: art history puts its object in perspective.

Perspective is, of course, a means for negotiating the spatial relation between subject and object, and when we take it as a more general epistemological model for the relation of subject and object we commit ourselves to an essentially spatial conception. Michael Podro, in his study of Panofsky's early writings, points briefly to two essays that importantly extend that model to the field of history—"Albrecht Dürer and Classical Antiquity" (1921–22) and "The First Page of Giorgio Vasari's 'Libro': A Study on the Gothic Style in the Judgment of the Italian Renaissance." The first of these argues, in keeping with Panofsky's general use of Dürer during this time, "that Dürer came to understand classical art not by direct confrontation with it, but by the mediation of Italian Renaissance re-interpretation,"<sup>10</sup> thus setting the Renaissance interpretive stance toward history in implicit relation to the epistemological attitude embedded in the practice of perspective as Dürer theorizes it. "The First Page of Vasari's 'Libro'" makes the connection between historical stance and epistemological attitude fully explicit. While the essay's scholarly argument is long, dense, and circuitous, its overall shape is both clear and simple. What Panofsky has before him is a drawing to which has been applied a pen and bistre paper frame that includes an attribution of the drawing to Cimabue.<sup>11</sup> There is clear evidence that the drawing belonged to Giorgio Vasari and that the paper frame is of his making, and Panofsky's central question is what we are to make of this frame applied by this hand to this particular drawing. The answer to

this question is that "Vasari's inconspicuous 'Gothic' frame bears witness, at a relatively early date, to the rise of a new attitude toward the heritage of the Middle Ages: it illustrates the possibility of interpreting mediaeval works of art, regardless of medium and *maniera*, as specimens of a 'period style.' . . . Vasari's frame marks the beginning of a strictly art-historical approach which . . . is focused on the visual remains and proceeds, to borrow Kant's phrase, in a 'disinterested' manner."<sup>12</sup> While the appeal to Kantian "disinterest," particularly in relation to the essay's titular invocation of "judgment," might seem to refer to aesthetic judgment as Kant describes it, what we have here is in fact a deep and thoroughgoing rejection of such judgment, at least as it might be thought relevant to the practice of art history. The point of the essay is that Vasari's judgments, like those of the art history he inaugurates, are "relative and absolute at the same time"—exactly the argument Panofsky had made for Renaissance perspective—because epistemologically well grounded. That is, Vasari's frame bears witness to the Renaissance emergence of "what we may call a historical point of view—historical in the sense that phenomena are not only connected in time but also evaluated according to 'their time.'"<sup>13</sup> Such estimation by the standards that inhabit a particular time is precisely not a judgment of taste but an act of knowing and so also not "disinterested" in Kant's aesthetic sense: a flower we find beautiful is, according to Kant, one we at best barely recognize as a flower at all, so struck are we by its being precisely and uniquely what it is, whereas the period recognition of a work of art is above all a matter of knowing its proper historical and cultural measure (the measure Vasari's frame effectively is for the Cimabue drawing it encloses).

By the time of "Iconography and Iconology," Panofsky is able to reduce the intricate chain that binds all these early essays together to formulations as direct as this:

For the medieval mind, classical antiquity was too far removed and at the same time too strongly present to be conceived as an historical phenomenon . . . [N]o medieval man could see the civilization of antiquity as a phenomenon complete in itself, yet belonging to the past and historically detached from the contemporary world—as a cultural cosmos to be investigated and, if possible, to be reintegrated, instead of being a world of living wonders or a mine of information. . . . Just as it was impossible for the Middle Ages to elaborate the modern system of perspective, which is based on the realization of a fixed distance between the eye and the object and thus enables

the artists to build up comprehensive and consistent images of visible things; so it was impossible for them to evolve the modern idea of history, based on the realization of an intellectual distance between the present and the past which enables the scholar to build up comprehensive and consistent concepts of bygone periods.<sup>14</sup>

It's important, however, about "Iconography and Iconology" that this succinct summary no longer appears as a way of discovering the embeddedness of art-historical objectivity within the Renaissance but as a particular instance of iconographical and iconological method; the dependence of that method on the instance in question is at once clearly visible and displaced or concealed.

The stakes in moving from the German writings of the 1920s to Panofsky's major American statement of art-historical method become clearer if one sees the writings of the 1920s in their immediate intellectual, and particularly philosophical, context. During this period Panofsky is, in effect, writing just along the edge of Germany's most salient philosophical divide, between a neo-Kantianism that finds its most definitive voice in Ernst Cassirer and a distinctly more radical philosophical impulse—the "fundamental ontology" of Martin Heidegger—that also takes Kant as a central reference but of a very different sort. It's helpful to hear Panofsky's remarks about perspective—for example, that it "creates distance between human beings and things . . . but then in turn it abolishes this distance by, in a sense, drawing this world of things, an autonomous world confronting the individual, into the eye"<sup>15</sup>—alongside Heidegger's presentation of "de-distancing" (*ent-fernung*, also sometimes rendered as "dis-severance"): "De-distancing means making distance disappear, making the being at a distance of something disappear, bringing it near. Da-sein [Heidegger's preferred word for human being] is essentially de-distancing. As the being that it is, it lets beings be encountered in nearness. De-distancing discovers remoteness. . . . Only because beings in general are discovered by Da-sein in their remoteness, do 'distances' and intervals among innerworldly beings become accessible in relation to other things."<sup>16</sup>

Heidegger and Panofsky are evidently both addressing the same general kind of fact, one that has to do with the way in which human beings have a capacity to make sense of distance, that is, to both recognize it and in doing that also do something like overcome it. And they both understand

this capacity as integrally bound up with the possibility and necessity of interpretation. (One might then try comparing this human capacity with a cat's success in pouncing on a bit of trailed string: this too is a successful negotiation with something like distance and its overcoming, but it seems purely a reflex or motor negotiation in which, one is inclined to think, "distance" does not figure as such—cats, Heidegger might say, cannot be said to "discover remoteness.") Given this proximity, it can be tempting to say that Panofsky's treatment of perspective can be understood as a particular crystallization of Heidegger's more general notion of "de-distancing."

But this is in fact just where the disagreement lies. For Heidegger, "de-distancing" is a dimension of what we are, whereas for Panofsky perspective is a tool we might or might not take up—a figure for method and not for existence. Heidegger thus stands to Panofsky very much as Hegel placed himself in relation to Kant in the opening pages of the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, as he explores what he takes to the Kantian temptation to imagine cognition as a kind of tool whose reliability is in question and thus must be ensured:

It would seem, to be sure, that this evil could be remedied through an acquaintance with the way in which the instrument works; for this would enable us to eliminate from the representation of the Absolute [Hegel's word for "what truly is"] which we gained through it whatever is due to the instrument, and thus get to truth in its purity. But this "improvement" would in fact only bring us back to where we were before. If we remove from a reshaped thing what the instrument has done to it, then the thing—here the Absolute—becomes for us exactly what it was before this [accordingly] superfluous effort. On the other hand, if the Absolute is supposed merely to be brought nearer to us through this instrument, without anything in it being altered, like a bird caught by a lime-twigg, it would surely laugh our little ruse to scorn, if it were not with us, in and for itself, all along, and of its own volition. . . . Or, if by testing cognition, which we conceive of as a medium, we get to know the law of its refraction, it is again useless to subtract this from the end result. For it is not the refraction of the ray, but the ray itself, whereby truth reaches us, that is cognition; and if this were removed, all that would be indicated would be a pure direction or a blank space.<sup>17</sup>

Like Heidegger, Hegel is forcefully asserting that our relation to an object or a world (and its relation to us) must be there in advance of any tool we might imagine as giving us access to it—so Hegel and Heidegger alike produce arguments against method just where Panofsky appeals strongly to it.<sup>18</sup>

Unsurprisingly, this contrast plays out in distinctly different understandings of interpretation and its relation to the objects that are its occasion. In particular, while Panofsky sees objects as available for interpretation, Heidegger sees them as given in interpretation, already caught up in interpretation simply in being the things they are. What one might call “explicit interpretation” is the continuation of a movement the object itself already is; interpretation so conceived is necessarily circular, at least in the sense that there is nothing external to interpretation to which it might be anchored or against which its adequacy might be gauged.

Panofsky’s primary intellectual allegiance is to Cassirer, but he is at least briefly sufficiently intrigued by Heidegger to try out some central Heideggerean notions in one of his last German publications:

In Heidegger’s book on Kant, there are some remarkable sentences on the nature of interpretation, sentences that at first glance refer only to the interpretation of philosophical texts but which at bottom characterize the problem of interpretation in general: “If an interpretation,” Heidegger writes, “reproduces only what Kant has expressly said, then it is from the outset no longer an interpretation insofar as an interpretation has for its task to render expressly visible that which, beyond its explicit formulation, Kant has brought to light in its very foundation; but that Kant could no more take the measure of than any philosophical knowledge in which what is decisive is not what is said *expressis verbis* but the unexpressed placed before our eyes in what is expressed. . . . Of course, any interpretation, in order to abstract from what the words say that which they mean to say, must employ violence.” It’s incumbent on us to recognize that these remarks bear on our modest descriptions of paintings and the interpretations we give of their content just insofar as they do not rest at the level of simple statement but are themselves already interpretations.<sup>19</sup>

“Iconography and Iconology” quietly withdraws the claim of a necessary interpretive violence altogether and works actively to discount the continuity between description and interpretation that this passage so explicitly endorses. Instead, interpretation is posed as nearly as possible in terms of a well-grounded and essentially “scientific” proceeding, founded on an act of “natural” or “factual” description which serves as the stable support for the attribution of specific conventional meanings, which in their turn offer the necessary support for the fullest account of the object in terms of its intrinsic human meaning. Panofsky’s stolidly rectangular synoptic table with its neatly carpentered rows and columns appears in marked, if implicit,

contrast with Heidegger’s embrace of interpretation’s necessary circularity.<sup>20</sup> Equally implicitly, and rather less markedly, it refuses Hegel’s dialectical image of the spiral shape assumed by knowledge as it begins in inchoate self-certainty, loses itself in otherness, and finally returns to itself in fully articulated self-possession—a scheme that nonetheless remains legible in the diagram’s articulation of a passage from the natural through the cultural and conventional and back to the recovered universality of human nature.

“Iconography and Iconology” is an essay we read easily; we have no trouble seeing what Panofsky means. The essay makes sense in our curriculum, and it makes sense of our curriculum. But this is very largely because it in large measure produced that curriculum. As one’s focus on it shifts from what it means to what it does, the text itself becomes notably less transparent, and one becomes much more acutely conscious of the often slippery relation between what it means and what it says. The essay opens with an example appealing in its ordinariness and clarity—my tipping my hat in passing an acquaintance on the street. But we are now perhaps somewhat less inclined to let ourselves slide unresistingly into Panofsky’s ample first person. We see two men tipping their hats in mutual recognition, mirror images of one another perhaps, sure of the humanity they share and affirm in one another. We may be tempted to give them names—Vasari, perhaps, and Panofsky, or maybe Panofsky and Dürer, or then again perhaps Vasari and Dürer. We may begin to wonder why we seem always to have one more name than the street or the mirror seems to require, and we may wonder what sense the dance of these three particular names makes: shall we say that Vasari is art history’s natural fact, Dürer its theoretical specification, Panofsky its universalization? Or would we rather say that as each pair of figures takes its turn in the mirror, the third rotates into place as its support, at once crucial to the recognitions it enables and inevitably concealed behind it?

Might this scene, this moment of mutual recognition, perhaps be worked by some trace or threat of violence? Panofsky notes that “this form of salute is peculiar to the Western world and is a residue of mediaeval chivalry: armed men used to remove their helmets to make clear their peaceful intentions and their confidence in the peaceful intentions of others.”<sup>21</sup> Are we inclined to connect this by some path other than that of Panofsky’s evident meaning to what may now seem the strange particularity of the essay’s extended example of a beheading problematically disconnected both from its maker and its motif? Certainly when we look to Caravaggio, a major fig-

ure in the Baroque tradition to which this example unquestionably belongs, we find the motif of beheading circulating with extraordinary freedom among Judiths and Salomés and Davids but always also in close proximity to both mirrors and self-portraiture. What was Vasari doing when he cut and pasted his paper frame on Cimabue's sheet of sketches—putting it in perspective?

There are ways to go on with such questions, and this book will explore at least some of them. But for the moment it's enough to notice that in them reading becomes something other than seeing what the text—but we might as well say also painting or work of art—means. It's become a more complex kind of attention, uneasily balanced between seeing and interpreting, and balanced there in ways that leave us profoundly uncertain about what we might want to say or not say about the relations between the textual or discursive and the visual.

IN PARTIAL SUMMARY, THEN: In his repeated discovery of “historical distance” as the defining feature of both art history and its preeminent Renaissance objects, Panofsky accomplishes a number of things that have come to be constitutive of contemporary art-historical practice. He breaks history definitively away from criticism and its problematic, judgmental intimacy with its object. He likewise breaks art history's general object away from the present and so implicitly raises a question around “the modern” as an alternative site for art history's self-understanding. He breaks with his own immediate art-historical predecessors, Alois Riegl and Heinrich Wölfflin, who had, in different ways, urged a vision of art history emerging out of their continuing attachments to the Baroque and to a distinctively Northern art. And, perhaps most important, he invents a particular need for “method” as the means by which “historical distance” can be appropriately bridged.

“Iconography and Iconology” is, most directly, the exposition of just such a method, a step-by-step passage from our natural responsiveness to images across the difficult chasm of cultural or historical difference and then back to the shared ground of the fully human. The name of this movement—and so also of the art historian's primary intellectual activity—is “interpretation” and the ground upon which it moves—the primary object of art-historical inquiry—is “meaning.” The primary reference of “theory” in such a model will be to method—to the equipment and controlling principles that prevent the art historian from falling into mere intuition or speculation.

“Iconography and Iconology” has, of course, not gone without criticism of various kinds. Formalists have repeatedly criticized its orientation to meaning and the accompanying tendency, as they would claim, to reduce complex visual works to their literary sources. Sir Ernst Gombrich has pointed out various problematic Hegelian residues in Panofsky's thought—both the familiar dialectical passage from the natural through the cultural to the fully human we've already remarked upon and the vision of cultural wholeness (what Gombrich calls “Hegel's Wheel”) that is particularly prominent in Panofsky's *Gothic Architecture and Scholasticism*—while continuing and extending his emphasis on historical distance and the corresponding need for method. And outside of art history itself there have been a series of sustained developments and transformations in ideas about interpretation. One major impetus to these developments emerges out of Heidegger's presentation of interpretation not as a stance toward the world but as the actual lived shape of its inhabitation, thus bottomless and not conformable to the strictures of method. Heidegger's picture of interpretation, particularly as extended and transformed by figures like his follower Hans-Georg Gadamer and the French philosopher Jean-Luc Nancy, continues to be a valuable resource for any effort to think anew about art history as a mode of intellectual inquiry, and this general current of thought is certainly one of the central informing grounds for much of the “theory” that began to exert a strong influence on the humanities across the board in the 1970s and 1980s.<sup>22</sup>

While we will certainly encounter elements of these alternate strains in art history in the pages that follow, for the moment we want to emphasize several key points that emerge from this consideration of Panofsky's work:

1. Panofsky is in a certain sense exemplary in his way of constructing a vision of art history—of its objects, ground, and procedures—out of his attachment to a particular set of objects within it. Of course putting his achievement in these terms suggests that other constructions of the discipline—other modes of attachment to its subjects—might also be possible, and in these other constructions objects, grounds, and procedures might be very differently articulated and distributed.
2. “Method” arises as a central term within Panofskian art history just because of the way the field is constructed more generally; the role of method within this field is both to guarantee and, more importantly, to define “objectivity.” This too might be otherwise. It might also be noted that the field structured by “historical distance” necessarily includes a place for the skeptical art historian who would accept the relevance of the model of historical distance while remaining un-

persuaded of the possibility of actually bridging that distance—a skeptic, then, evidently committed to both subjectivity and method.

3. The distinctive peculiarity of Panofskian art history is that it expresses its attachment to its objects as detachment from them and takes such detachment as the general shape of art-historical objectivity. Deep alternatives to Panofsky will appear—within Panofsky's frame—as both “subjective” and methodologically unconstrained in ways that will make their more particular sense difficult to see or hear, and it will be strongly tempting to assimilate such alternatives to the kind of skepticism touched on above.

### SPANS

In this light it is particularly interesting to turn to the work of Michael Baxandall, most especially his 1985 book, *Patterns of Intention: On the Historical Explanation of Pictures*.<sup>23</sup> Baxandall, like Panofsky, makes his period home in the Renaissance—*Patterns of Intention* was preceded by studies of Northern Renaissance sculpture, explorations of Italian humanist rhetoric in relation to painting, and a study contextualizing Renaissance painting in relation to a notable range of broader Renaissance practices, including matters as various as forms of contract, commercial estimation, and dancing.<sup>24</sup> *Patterns* does its work across a considerably broader range of examples, devoting chapters to Picasso and Chardin as well as to Piero della Francesca, and notably also including an extended opening treatment of Benjamin Baker's 1890 Forth Bridge. Baxandall repeatedly qualifies his interests in the book as “sub-theoretical,” a term at once dryly ironic and wholly accurate in capturing the book's complex refusal of “method” as well as its marked lack of interest in the kinds of philosophic reference that played so large a role in our exposition of Panofsky. If it would be too much to say that Baxandall in effect substitutes irony for method, it is certainly true that *Patterns* is informed at every level by an extraordinary rhetorical alertness and so demands an answering alertness in its reader—a demand Baxandall makes clear enough in an early remark about the book's title, “in which the multiple puns (I count three or four) are important to me.”<sup>25</sup> The pronounced writerly artifice of *Patterns of Intention* makes a marked contrast with Panofsky's much more workmanlike prose, and so may suggest that the reader ought to take particular notice when Baxandall starts referring to the terms of his account, in the closing chapter, of Piero's *Baptism of Christ* as “plain reading.”

The first object Baxandall takes up in *Patterns* is the Forth Bridge, and it seems to serve him as a particularly clear example for a discussion of method: a good account of how this object came to be as it was would, Baxandall suggests, depend above all on a usefully full account of the Charge that Baker was given (to bridge the Firth of Forth) and of the implicit Brief he developed to fill that out (a list of features like the physical situation, material and structural possibilities, known difficulties, and so on). This is, particularly coming hard on the heels of our discussion of Panofsky, a striking starting point: the work as made thing rather than vehicle for meaning.

But we do well to note, before turning more fully to Baxandall's proposal here, that the Forth Bridge is not quite the first object Baxandall treats. His first object appears quite casually. The book opens with Baxandall's saying (the book revises lectures given at Berkeley in 1982 and intentionally retains a strongly spoken tone): “We do not explain pictures: we explain remarks about pictures—or rather, we explain pictures only in so far as we have considered them under some verbal description or specification. For instance . . .”<sup>26</sup> And the instance offered is Piero's *Baptism of Christ*, which continues to show up throughout Baxandall's introduction without ever appearing as its object (“Here is an excellent passage from Kenneth Clark's account of Piero della Francesca's *Baptism of Christ* . . .” “This can be illustrated by taking and sorting a few words from Kenneth Clark's pages on Piero's *Baptism* . . .” “I could plausibly say of either Piero della Francesca's *Baptism of Christ* or Picasso's *Portrait of Kahnweiler* . . .” “Suppose I say of the *Baptism of Christ* . . .”). The general issue this particular painting is repeatedly chosen to exemplify is, broadly, descriptive, and is more specifically attached to Baxandall's worrying at what it might mean to speak of “firm design” in relation to this work—a matter, one might say, of “plane reading.” The turn in the next chapter to an extended account of the Forth Bridge immediately situates this evidently “formal” focus in the field of practical doing and making—the executing of commissions—rather than that of the appreciative discernment we most commonly associate with “formal analysis.”

What then does Baxandall offer by way of method? There is first all the thought that things made can be analyzed in terms of a fairly empty Charge (“Bridge!” is Baxandall's shorthand for Baker's Charge) and the maker's responding Brief, which Baxandall lays out in this instance as an extensive sample from a presumably larger and notably heterogeneous list of considerations bearing on the bridge's physical situation, existing materials and



know-how, design commitments, prior history of construction on that site, and so on. As Baxandall works through the relations between Charge, Brief, and the bridge itself, he is led to redescribe his activity as sort of game played out on a “triangle of re-enactment.”

“What we do,” he says, “if we want to know about Baker is to play a conceptual game on the triangle, a simplified reconstruction of the maker’s reflection and rationality applying an individual selection from collective resources to a task.”<sup>27</sup> A brief summary is then followed by a few remarks transitional toward the objects that are presumably the book’s primary concern—works not of engineering but of art.

This transition merits particular attention. It begins by asserting that while “it is possible to find objects with which one can follow something that looks a little like the Forth-Bridge type of explanation,” he prefers to begin with a work (Picasso’s *Portrait of Kahnweiler*) that puts such explanation “under heavy strain.” A few pages further along he specifies this strain more closely: “Something quite preliminary that is missing is the problem that Picasso was addressing, both general Charge and specific Brief.”<sup>28</sup> What, then, the reader is surely entitled to ask, was the point of the Forth Bridge exercise? And if we are going to say, as Baxandall eventually does, that “Picasso’s Charge really resided in the body of previous painting Picasso would have acknowledged as painting worthy of the term,”<sup>29</sup> would it not have been better to have turned first to one of the many moments in the history of art where Charge and Brief are still relatively explicit and independent of the peculiar notion of artistic autonomy that Baxandall’s “body of previous painting Picasso would have acknowledged as painting worthy of the term” is evidently aimed at—for example, Piero’s *Baptism of Christ*, where there is a clear Charge, a direct commission to make an altarpiece according to terms that are partially embedded in an explicit contract—and then, as it were, to work one’s way forward toward Picasso, demonstrating along the way something of how the external Charge so clearly visible in Piero’s case becomes progressively more deeply embedded within the history and practice of painting itself? What is the point of a statement of method, if its immediate sequel is the abandonment of that method rather than (as in “Iconography and Iconology”) its demonstration or application? Why write a book that seems conceptually and historically backward, at odds with itself?

Not asking these questions will amount to not reading Baxandall’s book,

and since readers do frequently manage not to ask these questions, it’s probably worth noticing some of what goes into passing over them: There is, for example, a marked willingness to take Baxandall’s repeated denigrations of “theory” and “method,” his refusal to claim he has things of this kind to present, as so much rhetoric, exercises in a certain kind of false modesty, and so on (we know what theory and method are, and we know what follows from them). There is a strong sense also of knowing what “examples” are—cases that have, certainly, their historical or cultural specificity but that also stand in a constant relation to the theory or method we bring to them, so the order in which they appear is not a deep feature of them except in those instances where the examples specifically build in some further illustrative complexity. This is closely linked to a further expectation that the order of theoretical exposition is in principle independent of the relating of relevant examples within a historical narrative (so we take Baxandall’s subtitle, *On the Historical Explanation of Pictures*, to mean that history is the field of explanation but not a dimension of it; “historical” doesn’t modify “explanation” that way). This list can no doubt be extended considerably further; failing or refusing to read is at least as complex a business as reading itself.

If one is hauled up short by the oddness of this transition, one may discover oneself explicitly caught up in a moment of reading or rereading. One’s eye might, for example, be stuck on Baxandall’s particular way of stating what the Picasso painting does to his method—it puts it “under heavy strain”—so that one becomes suddenly alert to the connectedness of this particular phrasing with a particular strand of language that has run throughout the Forth Bridge chapter, a strand in which talk of tension, compression, and load-bearing is closely interwound with talk of alloying and assaying and, for that matter, talk of strands and their intertwining. Sometimes these words and phrases will have clearly belonged to talk about the bridge, its actual materials and construction; at other times they will appear, in retrospect if not on first reading, as belonging more or less to Baxandall’s reading of that construction; at still other times it will seem difficult to pin down exactly where they fit among the bridge and Baker and Baxandall. A scattering of passages:

These are surely objective circumstances, in the sense of having a real presence apart from Baker’s mind. However, what is less stable is their weighting, their relative mass in the thinking that made the design.<sup>30</sup>

Yet it was he who fixed on this or that rather than another and it was he who alloyed them into *a* form.<sup>31</sup>

I cannot distribute the different circumstances of the bridge among its different sections—side winds to the left, Siemens steel to the right, expressive functionalism somewhere else. In the form of the Bridge, Baker alloyed circumstances, he did not aggregate or collocate them, and we cannot follow him conceptually into the alloyed form of the Bridge. By assaying it out, in the sense of overlaying the form with conceptualizations that have at least something in common with the tissue of his own self-critical reflection, we make it treatable to a degree.<sup>32</sup>

What we're noticing now is, of course, Baxandall's writing, not exactly in distinction from something we are tempted to call his theory or his method but perhaps as a crucial element or condition of it. We had no occasion to notice Panofsky's writing this way, and when we did start noticing features of Panofsky's writing it was if we had found a way of undercutting its apparent transparency; noticing Baxandall's writing feels, by contrast, like a step toward getting his proceedings in focus.

We are also noticing a specific rhetorical feature of that writing. "Metaphor" will be a tempting word for what we think we are seeing here, but this term would have to be carefully weighed against the device Baxandall points to in his preface, the pun—which does indeed seem a better way to capture the movement that carries "alloying" from metallurgy to circumstances to the Bridge's form and into Baxandall's own account of these things, thus offering a way to understand how Baxandall's words of this kind less stand for some feature of his object than are as if continuous with it, at once internal to it and extensions of it. The particularly insistent word "alloy" of course also points to something very much like this: the steel Baker made such innovative use of, among whose notable properties are a combination of strength and flexibility, is, of course, an alloy, a mixture of heterogeneous materials that fuse under heat and pressure. Baxandall's chapter evidently means to be made of a similar stuff:

If I use the concept "design" I do not normally use it in all these senses at once. If I used it of a picture in a more unqualified way—as in "I do like the design of this picture"—surely I would be shedding for the moment that part of its sense that lies in the process of making the picture and referring to a quality more intrinsic to the marks on the panel—"pattern" rather than "drawing" or

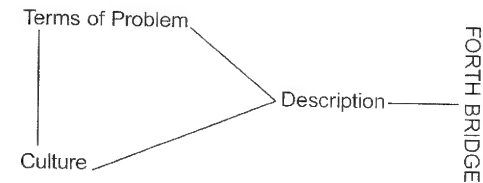
"purposing" or "planning"? In its finished reference this may be so: I would be entitled to expect you to take it, for the purpose of criticism, in that more limited sense. But in arriving at it, I and you and the word would have been coming from the left of the field, so to speak: there are leftist and centrist uses of "design" in current and frequent use, but if we pick on the centrist denotation we have been active on the left at least to the extent of shelving its meanings.<sup>33</sup>

If, working through this exploration of the senses alloyed as "design," one recognizes "pattern" (surface design, template, etc.) as itself one vehicle of the multiple puns that form the book's title, then one will also begin to see the paragraph itself as a complex, tensile lattice that opens its writing toward something for which "allegory" will probably be the most tempting word—as, for example, in a passage like this:

For instance, if we are told or if we infer after observation that Benjamin Baker reckoned tubes best for compression lines and lattice girders best for tension lines with secondary shear stress, this surely sharpens our sense of the organization of matter within the cantilevers. But, correspondingly, once one has got to this point, the object itself leads us to see the progressive sharpening of the angle of the cross-tubes as one moves out on to the wings of the cantilevers (Pl. 5) and much else which one does not have to spell out. This is the nature of the critical act.<sup>34</sup>

The parenthetical visual reference in this passage is to a photograph of the Forth Bridge's central pier and southern cantilever (figure 1).

But the nearest visual reference, which strikingly resembles the photograph, is the diagram just above this paragraph on the same page:



Baxandall's "conceptual game on the triangle" suddenly appears as, overwhelmingly, also a pun played upon or discovered in its object. Nothing emerges as "method" that does not more or less immediately dissolve into



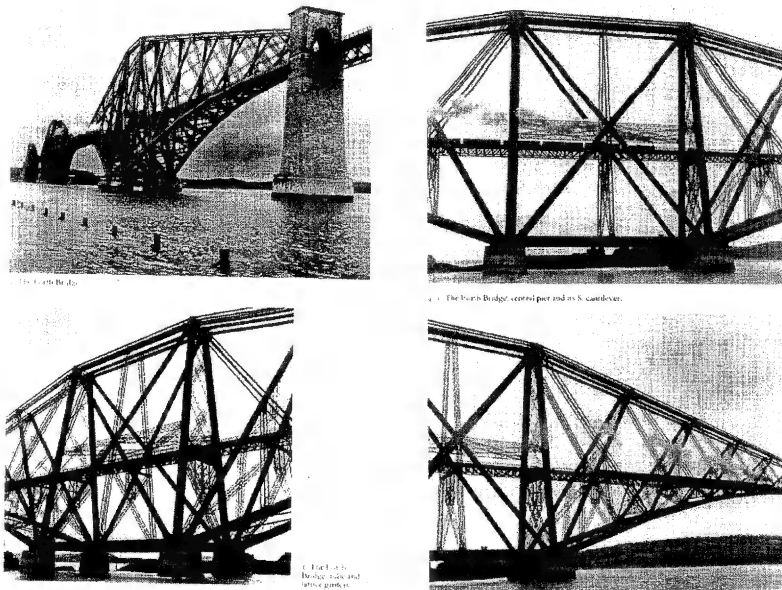


FIGURE 1. Michael Baxandall, *Patterns of Intention*, figures 2–5. Photographs by Eric de Maré.

the writing of the object. This is the nature of the act Baxandall specifies as “critical” and places at the center of historical explanation.

We got into all this by wondering about the transition from the book’s first chapter, on Baker, to its second chapter, on Picasso, and particularly about what appeared the arbitrary abandonment of method at just that point. But we may now be strongly tempted to take this transition as answering exactly to the passages within Baker’s Bridge from pier to cantilever. And we may be equally strongly tempted to take the book as a whole as having a structure like that of a single span within the bridge—two pier chapters, on Baker and Piero, supported by the architecture of Charge and Brief, between which springs the cantilevered span of Picasso and Chardin, a structure clearly displayed in Baxandall’s illustration of “the structural principle of the Forth Bridge demonstrated by members of Benjamin Baker’s staff”<sup>35</sup> (figure 2). Seeing the book this way, one might find oneself pausing also over a double-page spread that faces off Picasso’s *Les Femmes d’Alger* and a longitudinal view down the cantilevered span (figure 3). Is this what it looks like to face the past?

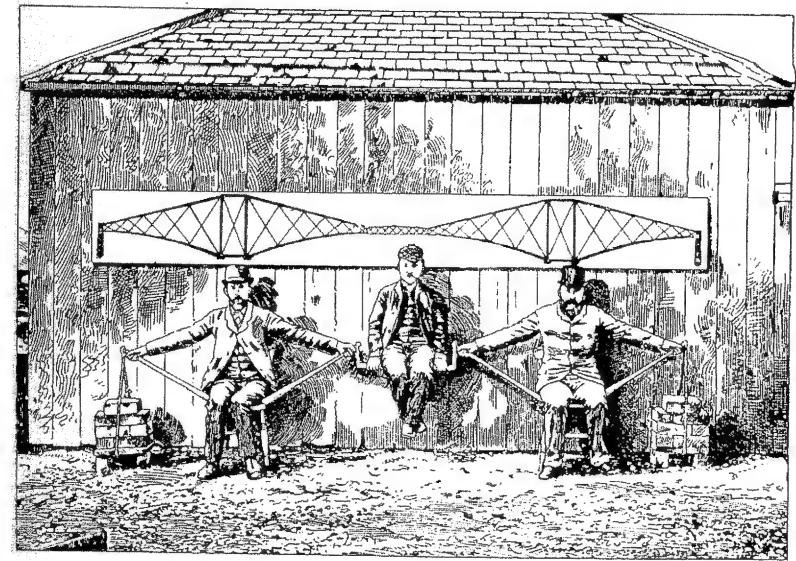


FIGURE 2. Michael Baxandall, *Patterns of Intention*, p. 21. Drawing by Eric de Maré after a contemporary photograph.

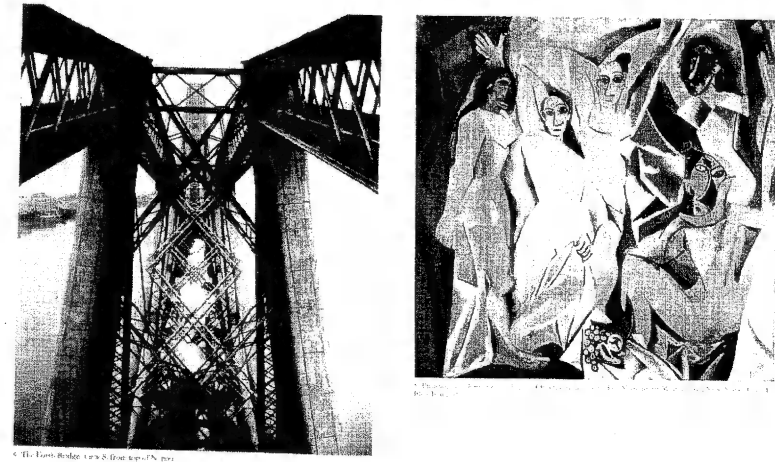


FIGURE 3. Michael Baxandall, *Patterns of Intention*, figures 6 and 7. L: photograph by Eric de Maré. R: Picasso, *Les Femmes d'Alger*.

Baker's Bridge, as we now have it, is not simply an exemplary object of explanation but an allegory of it. One way the historian standardly takes his or her Charge is as, precisely, *Bridge!*—which is to say, find some way to get from here, this present, to there, that distant past. The Forth Bridge is a realized interpretation of this Charge, succeeding not because it is solidly supported every step of the way but because over crucial spans it supports itself. “Span” shows itself as a particular interpretation of the Charge *Bridge!*, and it is one of particular interest to Baxandall just because it borders on—raises the question of—the relation between what is self-supporting and what is solid because it rests on firm ground. To grasp a span as a span is to grasp a system of relations sustaining itself as a whole, thus something very like an object—and a very different object from the implicit post-and-lintel construction of, for example, Panofsky's synoptic table. One major difference is that this object models not method but art's actual history—the perverse sequence of Picasso, Chardin, Piero just is the spanning in question. From this vantage point, Panofsky's methodological worries look strangely dependent on repeatedly forgetting precisely that history, thus imposing on oneself the repeated and necessary imagination of some void—some uncrossable river or gulf—between the historian's present and the object's past. A cantilevered span is, in principle, built from both sides at once, and its effective principles are more imaginatively accessible if one pictures it, so to speak, from a spot within the river it crosses than by placing oneself on a given shore worrying about how to get to the other side.<sup>36</sup> This suggests that Baxandall is not simply giving us another way to build a bridge; he's suggesting a fundamentally different stance toward the past, one very strong consequence of which is that the works he addresses seem to play a fundamental role in making out the shape of that past rather than more simply standing within it as we might imagine, or represent, an object standing in a space. Baxandall couples something very much like formal analysis to historical explanation in a genuinely surprising way.<sup>37</sup>

If this is right, and if it is right to see Baxandall's diagram of the triangle of reenactment as a radical revision of and alternative to Panofsky's synoptic table, then it may be useful to imagine Panofsky as someone Baxandall has more or less constantly, if also obliquely, in view throughout *Patterns of Intention*. One might reasonably expect any implicit dialogue of this kind to come to some particular point with Baxandall's treatment of Piero's *Baptism of Christ*.

As we've already had occasion to note, Piero della Francesca's *Baptism of Christ* appears on the very first page of *Patterns of Intention* as the occasion for

a question about composition or “firm design.” It reappears in the book's closing chapter—and this should be surprising—as the vehicle through which Baxandall proposes to address “two related issues that have been hanging around”—questions about how far we can really “penetrate . . . cultures or periods remote from our own” and about “whether we can. . . verify or validate our explanations.”<sup>38</sup> These are the questions at the heart of Panofsky's vision of art history, and there's a sense in which Baxandall accepts Panofsky's way of formulating them—they are, for both Baxandall and Panofsky, matters of an observer putting things “in perspective” (“what the observer may have,” Baxandall writes, “is a perspective”).<sup>39</sup> But just here Baxandall puts a particular twist into these formulations by picking up on Piero's *commensurazione*—a word that names something very much like composition and does so in a way that gives perspective a particular importance. As Baxandall summarizes: “*Commensurazione*'s reference can be taken as to a general mathematics-based alertness in the total arrangement of a picture, in which what we call proportion and perspective are keenly felt as interdependent and interlocking.”<sup>40</sup> It is this broadness beyond perspective that allows him to speak of what he's after as “the distinctive colour of proportionality in Piero,”<sup>41</sup> a shift away from the Panofskian model that subtly transforms our sense of what it might mean that what we have on Piero is “perspective.”<sup>42</sup> Baxandall's remark on the interest of Piero's word is crucial: “Alien concepts like *commensurazione* have an important part not only because we apprehend historical distance in the course of learning them but because, in the texture of our conceptualization about the picture, they stand for a contrast between those people and us.”<sup>43</sup> Attending to *commensurazione* just is the apprehension of—the spanning, so also marking—of historical distance. And at the same time, *commensurazione* is a term that crystallizes our interest in the look—the composition—of the picture. It's this imagination of a historical spanning grounded in or supported by the picture itself that Baxandall has, in a sense, been after from the outset and that he has also drawn on throughout the book as each chapter cantilevers out into the next, making the whole a complex pattern of tensions and compressions carried and articulated in the alloying in Baxandall's sentences of their meanings and the pictures to which they point.

*Commensurazione* is, in modern English, “commensuration” or “commensurateness.” Taking it, as Piero evidently does, as a term for “composition,” it suggests strongly that a picture is a taking of its own measure, so to speak, setting its scene in proportion, finding its ratio. The interest it takes

in perspective is directly pictorial and not broadly epistemological because it is focused on how something finds within itself its proper measure and not on establishing a common—say, Euclidean—measure that can be imposed on a range of otherwise measureless things. In this sense, Baxandall's focus on Piero's painting and his ways of speaking of it is very precisely balanced against Panofsky's claim for the epistemological privilege of perspective and the rationalized space it offers as history.

The two issues with which the Piero chapter opens—how far we can really penetrate the intentional fabric of other cultures or periods and whether we can adequately validate claims to do so—are deeply familiar late-modern (some would say definitively postmodern) concerns, giving explicit expression to the skeptical possibilities within Panofsky's epistemological turn. The standard skeptical outcome is a claim about the “incommensurability” of cultures and periods, conceptual schemes, discourses, and the like—as if we were to imagine that such divergent formations had in every instance measures internal to them (say, centimeters here and inches there), but somehow had those systems of measure without having any more general notion of measure as such and were thus inconvertible and untranslatable. Maybe bees are in fact like this, communicating in their dances distances and directions that are peculiarly absolute or scaleless (one species' or hive's dance, we might imagine, would not simply be misunderstood by another—it would not be recognized as communicative at all). Baxandall's strong assumption is that neither pictures nor cultures are at all like this—that they are made above all of relation, and are thus necessarily and essentially self-critical, and are therefore also both inherently historical in themselves and essentially exposed to criticism and to transformation. Indeed, openness to criticism and historicity are all but identical in Baxandall's imagination of art history, an activity he refers to most frequently in *Patterns* as “inferential criticism.” It's from this position that Baxandall makes such peace as he feels it's necessary to make with such seemingly heavy weight theoretical terms as “scientific” and “hermeneutic,” thus also both with Panofsky and Panofsky's sometimes skeptical inheritors.

He takes particular care to work through the ways in which, while “meaning” is certainly among both the conditions and the effects of a picture like the *Baptism of Christ*, our interest in the picture remains answerable to nothing deeper than what he calls “plain reading.” “Plain reading” is of course hardly simple; if it can claim a certain freedom from various kinds

of self-mystification and misleading images of how surface and depth, past and present, might or might not belong to one another, it gives rise also to its own complex demands. In particular, just because it has no deeper anchor than the text or picture being read, it is obliged to show itself as, precisely, a reading or showing of that text or picture that remains permanently questionable: “Certainly,” Baxandall writes about whether or not he's done well enough by the Angels in the painting, “your feelings about this have quite the same status as mine.”<sup>44</sup> One suspects that this sentence gets slightly different readings in the United States and in England, in part because the word “quite” does not work the same way in the two countries and in greater part because Americans are more prepared to see in it a remark about the equality of opinions while English readers recognize in it a comment on the kind of authority such an account can claim.

The remark suggests that “we” are integral to *Patterns of Intention*, its claims not only offered or exposed to us but to be tested in us—a reason, one supposes, for Baxandall to have wanted to keep something of the lectures' oral quality and to pause in closing over how such speaking gets at the heart of “publication,” not as the notation and presentation of research results but as the voicing of experience that is, in principle, ours as well as his—sometimes ours over and against his, but (this would be the only measure of his authority) sometimes such that we find our experience corrigible by his.<sup>45</sup> One might claim that our desire for method is defense against the difficulty of this claim.

If to go on from “Iconography and Iconology” means to follow a method, how to go on from *Patterns of Intention* is harder to make out. The tempting thought is that it would be to take one's Charge from Baxandall in something like the way Picasso take his Charge from the body of painting he acknowledges as worthy of that name. But this, of course, would be to say that art history is unguaranteed by method, so always at stake in its doing and its writing. The choice is not between methods but between entire conceptions of the field: how it might be attached to or detached from its objects, how it might be distinct from or continuous with an activity called criticism, what objectivity might accordingly mean or not mean, what relations there might be between art history's history and its claims on knowledge or acknowledgment, what kinds of assent we can imagine for our accounts, and what dissent might matter in what way. These are the kinds of choices this book means to bring into view.

certainly right that it should understand some crucial part of its current task to be to recall the university to itself. An art history that has no reasons but its own can only vanish into a professionalism that we may be tempted to call "empty," but that is in fact wholly transparent to and so everywhere filled by the withdrawal or aversion of the world. Call this the logic of nihilism or capitalism or calculative rationality or technology or power, as you will—this book has not been about that, but its interest does not go apart from some reckoning of such conditions.

## NOTES

## CHAPTER ONE

1. Erwin Panofsky, "The History of Art as a Humanistic Discipline," 24.
2. *Ibid.*, 39.
3. There have been quite a few publications, some primers, some more advanced surveys, and a number of anthologies of essays that have opened onto this ground. Mention should be made here of some particularly pertinent examples: Mark A. Cheetham, Michael Ann Holly, and Keith Moxey, eds., *The Subjects of Art History*; Donald Preziosi, ed., *The Art of Art History: A Critical Anthology*; Dana Arnold and Margaret Iversen, eds., *Art and Thought*; Open University texts, including Steve Edwards, ed., *Art and Its Histories: A Reader*, and Michael Hatt and Charlotte Klonk, *Art History: A Critical Introduction to Its History*; and the various volumes of the Clark Art Institute's Studies in the Visual Arts.
4. Lacan—"Don't give up on your desire!"
5. "What now is the medium of music? If one wishes now to answer, 'Sound. Sound itself,' that will no longer be the neutral answer it seemed to be, said to distinguish music from, say, poetry or painting (whatever it means to 'distinguish' things one would never have thought could be taken for one another); it will be one way of distinguishing (more or less tendentiously) music now from music in the tradition, and what it says is that there are no longer any known structures which must be followed if one is to speak and be understood. The medium is to be discovered or invented out of itself." Stanley Cavell, *Must We Mean What We Say? A Book of Essays*, 221.
6. G. W. F. Hegel, *Aesthetics: Lectures on Fine Art*.
7. Terry Pinkard, *Hegel: A Biography*.
8. But see Beat Wyss's *Hegel's Art History and the Critique of Modernity* for an exploration of Hegel's aesthetics cast in terms of such an imagined encounter.
9. Chapters 3, 5, 6, and 7 are by Margaret Iversen; chapters 2, 4, 8, and 9 are by Stephen Melville.
10. This is certainly a place where our specific attention to Anglo American art history matters. Panofsky holds no such determining place in French art history, and the recent German discussions of *Bildeswissenschaft* reflect a significantly different reception of his work.

## CHAPTER TWO

1. Erwin Panofsky, "The Concept of Artistic Volition."
2. Dürer is an important relay within both the Wölfflinian and Panofskian constructions of art history, and his figurative relation to Friedrich Hölderlin in particular will come up again.
3. Erwin Panofsky, "The History of the Theory of Human Proportions as a Reflection of the History of Styles," 98.
4. Erwin Panofsky, *Perspective as Symbolic Form*, 65-66.
5. Panofsky, "History of the Theory of Human Proportions," 99.
6. *Ibid.*, 106-7.
7. Panofsky, *Perspective as Symbolic Form*, 40-41.
8. *Ibid.*, 67-68, 72. "Anthropocracy," coined here to rhetorically balance "theocracy," is of course what Panofsky will subsequently defend as art history's essential humanism, thus ordering its inquiry to what the perspective essay calls "psychology, in its highest sense," and the major methodological essay "Iconography and Iconology" will pose in terms of the "essential tendencies of the human mind."
9. Michael Podro, *The Critical Historians of Art*, 188.
10. *Ibid.*, 185.
11. This is a slightly simplified description of a more complex object.
12. Erwin Panofsky, "The First Page of Giorgio Vasari's 'Libro,'" 223-24.
13. *Ibid.*, 205.
14. Erwin Panofsky, "Iconography and Iconology: An Introduction to the Study of Renaissance Art," 50-51.
15. Panofsky, *Perspective as Symbolic Form*, 67.
16. Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 138 (translation modified). "Da-sein" is generally left untranslated in Heidegger texts. In ordinary German, it is one of several words that mean "existence," and Heidegger particularly favors it in part because it seems to capture within its own etymology (*Da* = "here" or "there"; *Sein* = "being") the play of distance and proximity that *ent-fernung* also addresses.
17. G. W. F. Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, 46-47.
18. And it's probably worth noting that Hegel's testing of our imagination of the instrumentality of knowledge raises questions about vision and optics. In Hegel's case, this is less directly a question of perspective than of the general opposition between Newtonian or Cartesian optics and Goethe's very different account of the visible. Heidegger to some extent inherits this contrast, no longer at the level of optical theory but at the level of metaphor, so that he speaks frequently of "the lighting up of Being" and tends to cast this lighting as a matter of "horizons" within which things are variously lit up or cast in shadow—a world shaped, finally, very differently from the infinite, homogenous, and fundamentally mathematical space Panofsky claims for rational perspective.
19. "In Heidegger's Kantbuch finden sich einige bemerkenswerte Sätze über das Wesen der Interpretation—Sätze, die sich zunächst nur auf die Auslegung philosophischer

- Schriften beziehen, die aber im Grunde das Problem jeglicher Interpretation bezeichnen: 'Gibt nun eine Interpretation lediglich das wieder, was Kant ausdrücklich gesagt hat, dann ist sie von vornherein keine Auslegung sofern einter solch die Aufgabe gestellt bleibt, dasjenige eigens sichtbar zu machen, was Kant über die ausdrückliche Formulierung hinaus in seiner Grundlegung ans Licht gebracht hat; dieses aber vermochte Kant nicht mehr zu sage, wie denn überhaupt in jeder philosophischen Erkenntnis nicht das entscheidend werden muß, was sie in den ausgesprochenen Sätzen sagt, sondern was sie als noch Ungesagtes durch das Gesagte vor Augen legt. . . . Um frielich dem, was die Wort sagen, dasjenige abzurufen, was sie sage wollen, muß jede Interpretation notwendig Gewalt brauchen.' Wir werden einsehen müssen, dass auch unsere bescheiden Bildbeschreibungen und Inhaltsdeutungen, insofern sie eben nicht einfache Konstatierungen, sondern auch schon Interpretationen sind, durch diese Sätze getroffen werden." Panofsky, "Zum Problem der Beschreibung und Inhaltsdeutung von Werken der bildenden Kunst," 1072. The passage can seem to present a number of problems of translation, particularly around Heidegger's contrast between *Interpretation* and *Auslegung*, but it is clear from Panofsky's introduction of the Heidegger passage that he either does not see or simply disregards Heidegger's contrast, and my (Melville's) translation follows accordingly. For a rendering more fully in accord with the standards of contemporary Heidegger translation, see George Didi-Huberman, *Confronting Images: Questioning the Ends of a Certain History of Art*, 101-2; it may be worth noting that the French Heidegger translation on which Didi-Huberman draws is itself closer to the passage as I've rendered it here. The Heidegger passage is given in *Kant and the Problem of Metaphysics*, 140-41. This edition includes a range of materials related to Heidegger's exchanges with Cassirer at Davos, on which see also Michael Friedman, *A Parting of the Ways: Carnap, Cassirer, and Heidegger*.
20. Heidegger's remark, in *Being and Time*, that "the circle must not be degraded to a *vitiosum*, not even to a tolerated one" is at direct odds with Panofsky's footnote 4 in "Iconography and Iconology." See Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 195.
  21. Panofsky, "Iconography and Iconology," 27.
  22. Gadamer's work, particularly his major book *Truth and Method*, is widely known, although not taken up in art historical contexts as frequently as it might be. Jean-Luc Nancy's work, which has direct relevance to questions of art history at several points, does not yet have the familiarity it should have in Anglo American contexts; this book will draw on several of his essays at various points.
  23. Michael Baxandall, *Patterns of Intention: On the Historical Explanation of Pictures*. A valuable set of reflections on Baxandall's work can be found in Adrian Rifkin, ed., *About Michael Baxandall*.
  24. See Michael Baxandall, *The Limewood Sculptors of Renaissance Germany; Giotto and His Orators: Humanist Observers of Painting in Italy and the Discovery of Pictorial Composition, 1350-1450; and Painting and Experience in Fifteenth-Century Italy: A Primer in the Social History of Pictorial Style*.
  25. Baxandall, *Patterns of Intention*, vii.

26. Ibid., 1.
27. Ibid., 34.
28. Ibid., 39.
29. Ibid., 46.
30. Ibid., 30.
31. Ibid., 32.
32. Ibid., 33.
33. Ibid., 7-8. Notice how far Baxandall is worrying all through here about a particularly complex pun offered as an explanation: the design is firm because the design is firm.
34. Ibid., 34.
35. Ibid., 21, fig. 4.
36. "Spanning" (*spannung*) emerges in certain of Heidegger's essays as a sort of translation or revision of *Being and Time*'s "de-distanciation" or "de-severance" (*ent-fernung*) in ways that may seem to have striking resonances, despite the vast difference in intellectual idiom, with what Baxandall is doing. See, for example, Heidegger, "Poetically Man Dwells."
37. One may be struck throughout by the strong resonances between Baxandall and aspects of the literary criticism of T. S. Eliot, Cleanth Richards, and the general terms of American New Criticism, but they are now clearly in service to a distinctly historical project.
38. Ibid., 105. Should one see in this coupling of "proportion" and "perspective" something like an allusion to the twin essays through which Panofsky sorts subjectivity and objectivity?
39. Ibid., 109.
40. Ibid., 113.
41. Ibid., 114.
42. This shift has in certain ways been prepared by the treatments of "color" and "distinctness" in the immediately preceding chapter on Chardin.
43. Ibid., 115.
44. Ibid., 130.
45. The questions of exposure and of experience that emerge here place Baxandall in interesting implicit conversation with both Jean-Luc Nancy and the threads developed out of Wittgenstein by Stanley Cavell and taken up strongly in Michael Fried's writings.

### CHAPTER THREE

1. The job was initially given to Karl Giehlow, a Viennese art historian who had written an article called "Dürers Kupferstich *Melencolia I* und der Humanistenkreis Maximilians I," but he left it unfinished as he died in 1913.
2. Erwin Panofsky and Fritz Saxl, *Dürer's Melencolia I: Eine Quellen- und Typen-Geschichtliche Untersuchung*. There is also an expanded version of the 1923 book: Raymond Klibansky, Erwin Panofsky, and Fritz Saxl, *Saturn and Melancholy: Studies in the History of Natural Philosophy Religion and Art*. I mainly refer to Panofsky, rather than

- Saxl, and tend to refer to the 1943 Dürer book for simplicity's sake and ease of access and also because it crystallizes Panofsky's view.
3. See Wolfgang Kemp, "Fernbilder: Benjamin und die Kunstwissenschaft."
4. Erwin Panofsky, "The History of Art as a Humanistic Discipline," 17-18.
5. E. H. Gombrich, *Aby Warburg: An Intellectual Biography*. The book includes many translated excerpts from otherwise inaccessible documents in Warburg's archive. An early and trenchant critique of the book can be found in Edgar Wind, "Aby Warburg's Concept of *Kulturwissenschaft*."
6. Gombrich, *Aby Warburg*, 13. See also E. H. Gombrich, "Aby Warburg (1866-1929)."
7. Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy and The Case of Wagner*, 46. Warburg's annotated copy of *Die Geburt der Tragödie* is in the Warburg Institute. He seems to have taken particular interest in section 5.
8. Aby Warburg, "Pagan-Antique Prophecy in Words and Images in the Age of Luther," 621.
9. Ibid., 598.
10. Aby Warburg, "Dürer and Italian Antiquity," 555. See Philippe-Alain Michaud, *Aby Warburg and the Image in Motion*, especially chapter 2 on "bodies in motion."
11. Spyros Papapetros makes the valid point that after World War II Gombrich may have had just cause to shy away from the 1920s rise in interest in humankind's irrational side. He continues, "The point could also be made that shying away has never made these monsters disappear. On the contrary, it can make them all the more persistent." "The Eternal Seesaw in Warburg's Revival," 173.
12. Warburg, "Dürer and Italian Antiquity," 555.
13. The German is "ruhiger Widerstandskraft," more precisely translated as "calm power of resistance."
14. Warburg, "Dürer and Italian Antiquity," 558.
15. Gombrich, *Aby Warburg*, p. 237. Quotation from unpublished notes in Warburg archive.
16. Warburg, "Pagan-Antique Prophecy," 599.
17. Ibid.
18. Ibid., 613.
19. Ibid., 636.
20. Ibid., 637.
21. Ibid.
22. Ibid., 641.
23. Ibid.
24. For an authoritative account of this complex of ideas from antiquity to the Renaissance see Klibansky, Panofsky, and Saxl, *Saturn and Melancholy*. For an overview and pertinent extracts from the entire history of melancholia see Jennifer Radden, ed., *The Nature of Melancholy from Aristotle to Kristeva*.
25. Warburg, "Pagan-Antique Prophecy," 641.
26. Ibid., 643.
27. Ibid.